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READERS' OPEN FORUM

Portland Street Fair

THE PORTLAND, OREGON, LIBRARY has met the man in the street! No longer can we be accused of nun-like seclusion within our own walls, for we have stood with our wares in the market place and have found that we can meet our fellow man on his own ground and talk to him in his own vernacular, even though hitherto he has been unaware of libraries or librarians.

For many months the circulation staff had been thinking about ways and means of making Portland readers conscious of the steadily increasing supply of books and pamphlets on the various phases of defense activities. We had in mind not only those activities connected with defense production, ship-building, munitions, airplanes, and other armaments, but also those of a social character, such as race relationships, nutritional and health programs, housing projects, and other activities vital to the healthy functioning of a democracy.

The problem was to find space within the Library that would allow us to bring together and show to advantage all the books we wanted to exhibit. And then one day our eye caught a comment about the Montclair cook-book fair. This gave us just the idea we had been waiting for, and immediately we began to plan a street fair of our own.

The first step was the appointment of a committee of five members who decided that the general theme for the fair would be the Saga of America. This theme was broken down into five divisions. They were called "Backgrounds of Democracy," "Ocean to Ocean," "Social Defense," "Industrial Defense," and "Military Defense." Committees were appointed to take the responsibility for making a book list on each one of these subjects. By the middle of the summer most of the Library staff was busy with some phase of the preparations.

Our first idea had been to arrange booths on the broad stone fence along the side of the Library, but the president of the Library Board, hearing of this plan, proposed that we use the sidewalk in front of the Pioneer Post Office, which meant that we would be across the street from our largest department store and on one of the busiest blocks in town. Permission to do this was easily obtained from the Federal Government and the City Council passed a special ordinance permitting the use of the sidewalk.

A member of the Library Board authorized one of the local advertising firms to assist us without cost to the Library in planning the set up of booths, outdoor advertising, and other such problems difficult for librarians to handle. Another member of the Library Board provided free the

carpenters who made the frames for the booths. We had hoped to be able to get large wooden signs to stand on the post office grounds advertising the fair, but had about given up this plan when we learned the cost of billboard advertising. But a Portland firm came to our aid and offered to put large signs on either end of the block at only the actual cost of the materials.

An awning company hearing that their first bids on canvas had been far higher than we could afford reduced the amount to an especially good price when they heard more of the particulars about the fair. Later in the summer the advertising company secured the interest of the young Chinese artist Fred Gong, winner of the American magazine's national poster competition. He volunteered to make pictorial presentations, on large banners, of the subjects; Ocean to Ocean, Military Defense, and Industrial Defense. As Portland people were especially interested in his work, we felt that his participation in our fair went a long way toward assuring its success.

On the morning of September 10, the six booths were set up, each one carrying a specially designed poster showing the subject around which the books in that booth were gathered. Each booth displayed about thirty books and the attractive book lists were placed in conspicuous positions to attract the passers-by. A librarian was stationed at each booth to answer questions, give out applications for new cards, sell reserve postal cards, and otherwise to represent the Library to all interested.

The sight of a row of six booths of gaily striped awnings on one of the busy blocks of the city could not fail to attract immediate attention. Questions and comments came in faster than they could be recorded. "What's the idea of this, propaganda of some sort!" "This is the most interesting thing I've ever known a library to do!" "This makes me homesick for Paris." "Why can't we always have books shown this way?" "What does the Library want to get mixed up in this war for?" These and dozens of other similar remarks were heard and jotted down to help give us a cross section of the reaction of our public to the venture.

Many were frankly puzzled as to why the Library should take its books out onto the street, some were convinced that it was English, Jewish, America First, or just plain war propaganda, but for the most part people were genuinely delighted with the display.

The local newspapers were most generous in giving us space in the pictorial supplement of the Sunday paper which carried good-sized pictures. To our surprise on the second morning we heard from passers-by

that Kate Smith had talked of our venture in her morning broadcast. Teachers spoke of it in their class rooms and club groups urged their members to make a trip down town to see the fair.

Were the results worth the time and effort put into the project? We think they were.

In the first place we have gained new readers, some, we feel sure, who would not have found their way into the Library without some such dramatic presentation of its multiple resources. And we have helped to create a more complete idea of defense by focusing attention on those books stressing values in American life which are most worth preserving. And, too, we have given the entire staff an opportunity of working together on a project entirely away from the traditional routine of library procedures and have shared together the fun of this adventure.

—CONSTANCE EWING,

Head, Circulation Department,
Portland, Oregon, Library Association

Periodical Exchange Union

THIS is a complaint about those who have decided not to follow the original plan of the Periodical Exchange Union. It may be just a voice crying in the wilderness, but it should be interesting to know how many feel the same way about it. The original rules and regulations specified in part:

"Sec. IV. Duplicate lists . . . should be forwarded directly to the first library on the routing list.

"Sec. V. When duplicate lists are received . . . (request items that are wanted, etc.) correct lists before forwarding to next library. Be careful to block out only requested items."

Thus conducted the lists would come to each participant in a steady flow as the preceding institution finished with them and each library would check only lists of material that was actually available, with the definite assurance that the request would be filled.

This logical procedure is evidently too slow for some eight or nine of the members of the Union; they have decided to send their lists to all members simultaneously and fill the requests in the order

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given by the routing sheet. It is frankly admitted that this may allow them to get rid of their duplicates in a shorter time, but only at an enormous cost in time and efficiency.

From our angle this is objectionable on the following points:

(1) The lists arrive early in large numbers instead of at the regular, logical time.

(2) It necessitates the checking of a long list of material that may or may not be available, since there is an average of 33.5 libraries ahead of each participant (in our case it is 55).

(3) It will probably prevent certain libraries securing items they are entitled to in this way: An item is requested on one list and, of course, not on others; but by the time the checker is informed that someone ahead of him took it, the other libraries offering this same item will probably have disposed of it to a library even farther down the list.

(4) It multiplies the task of record keeping manifold. By the substitute arrangement much longer requests are necessary, a record of them must be kept, and then this record must be changed for a great proportion that were not available, and the whole routine started over again.

Naturally the small libraries without a separate exchange department will suffer most under the changed routine, but it is apparent that all participants will be losing efficiency and doing much needless work.

We need space in our Library, too, but this material that has accumulated over a decade or more surely can be shelved for a few more months.

I, for one, hope that the other members of the Union follow the original plan, and that everyone involved secures so much benefit that such a scheme can be carried through at intervals in the future.

—FELIX EUGENE SNIDER,
Ln., East Carolina Teachers' College,
Greenville, N. C.

Co-operative Book Selection

FOR YEARS the younger librarians have asked why they could not take a more active part in truly professional matters; the question grew more insistent during the depression years, when librarians everywhere were forced to re-examine their duties and their habits. One of the results of this self-questioning at the University of Washington Library has been a staff committee known as the Committee on the Resources of the Library. As it is now beyond the experimental stage and bids fair to be permanent, the ideas back of it may prove of general interest.

Up to within the last decade, the selection of books for the Library had been almost wholly in the hands of the faculty. Naturally, each department bought only within its own sphere and often was not able to cover even that field, especially in

the social sciences. It was a young institution and funds were not abundant. Under the arrangement prevailing, the faculty was responsible for the depth of the Library's collection, but no one was responsible for the breadth. And so, as the years passed, the Library began to show gaps in older material of standard value, and in that borderline material that belongs specifically to no one subject. Periodicals were not involved in the problem because the Library already had an excellent collection of serials and funds for continuing them have been adequate. A general reading fund was set up to buy books of general interest, but these were mainly current, and although any member of the staff might suggest the purchase of a book that seemed desirable, no definite field of knowledge was set aside for each person and there was, therefore, no sense of responsibility among the staff as a whole for the choice of books. Another development along the same lines was a rental collection, the books for which were chosen by a committee of the Staff Association; but here again it was current titles only that were of concern.

Everyone who graduates from an American university must have had some major field of study. Yet on entering library work, in many cases this training is completely disregarded. Unless the librarian enters special library work in the field of his major, he has little opportunity to make use of his subject knowledge, and openings in special library work are not too abundant. The members of the University of Washington Library staff represent a fairly wide range of subjects—why not, it was thought, make use of this dormant and rapidly rusting asset? The germ of the idea that was to combine these two needs and evolve a possible solution cannot be credited to any one person; different phases were the contributions of different people. The final result was very properly a committee of the staff.

A small sum was secured for the first year on an experimental basis and a committee consisting of four staff members was set up; the chairman was appointed by the executive committee of the Staff Association and she chose the other members, one representing each division of the Library. The first task was to canvass the members of the staff in order to ascertain their major fields and to secure their co-operation. There was no compulsion in it, but all expressed their interest in the scheme and their desire to take part in it. Naturally each person's preparation differed in degree; some who were long out of college had lost touch with their subject and had to brush up with the aid of bibliographies; others found their interest had changed and their choice of subject was not that of their major field of study; but about one-third of the staff had kept up on their subjects and knew the Library's collection in these fields very

well. Since then, this one-third has increased to one-half and continues to grow. Because of staff changes, it can probably never be 100 per cent. The organization of the Resources Committee took place in October, 1939, and within six months its value had been so well demonstrated that its allotment was more than doubled for the fiscal year 1940-41, and for the current year it is more than three times the original allocation. Last spring the Resources Committee was presented to the Library Committee of the Faculty as a working concern and it met with prompt acceptance and encouragement; far from feeling that the librarians were interfering where they were not qualified to judge, the faculty committee welcomed their interest and praised their accomplishments.

The Resources Committee meets usually once a month except towards the end of the fiscal year, when funds are exhausted. Between meetings a small sum is allotted to each of the four divisions of the Library to cover immediate needs. Each member of the committee represents her division and brings to the meeting requests and suggestions from her colleagues. The recommendations of the individual librarians are not questioned as to desirability; it is taken for granted that they know their fields and the Committee does not pretend to omniscience. Rather, it acts as a clearing house and as a referee. For example, funds are limited and we cannot afford expensive books unless the need in that field is proved to be very great; here is shown the advantage of having all branches of the Library's work represented on the committee, for the need can be judged from all aspects. Then again, some members of the staff are more active than others and it is the duty of the committee to try to maintain a balance; otherwise we might find one or two persons spending almost the entire fund. When an individual makes a large number of recommendations (more than the committee feels can be allowed) we usually decide how much can be spent on that subject and leave the choice of the books to the person concerned.

In building up an organization such as the Resources Committee, all the possibilities and difficulties cannot be foreseen. It was anticipated, for instance, that secondhand book dealers' catalogs would be useful, but the extent of their value was completely underestimated. As it has worked out, the chairman of the committee has all secondhand catalogs routed to her desk; she looks them over briefly and re-routes them to the appropriate members of the staff. As a result, more than 50 per cent of the committee's purchases have come from this source and gaps of long standing have been filled in. Secondhand catalogs had long been troublesome stepchildren and everyone is very happy that they are at last coming into their own. As one of the committee's rules

(Concluded on page 37)